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AUTHOR Boylan, Colin; Bandy, Helen
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines seven variables or issues regarded as central to improving the recruitment, training, and retention of rural teachers, doctors, and other professionals, as well as efforts to overcome related problems in rural Australia and Canada. First, selection practices should identify professionals from rural backgrounds and those with personal characteristics or educational experiences that would predispose them to remain in rural areas. Second, this emphasis on background and experience is especially important in personnel selection for Aboriginal or other culturally distinct communities. Third, willingness to stay is influenced by the professional's integration into the community and involvement in community educational and cultural programs. Fourth, paraprofessionals can relieve work burdens and feelings of isolation for rural professionals, but often must perform tasks that exceed their training and expertise. Fifth, in Canada and Australia, federal and state governments offer special training programs for rural teachers and physicians and incentives for employment in remote areas, but improvement is needed in articulation between federal and state programs. Sixth, induction and mentorship programs can help beginning rural professionals to overcome feelings of isolation, acquire a sense of community security, and develop professional competence. Finally, successful preservice programs offer a specific rural focus in coursework and provide ample opportunity for rural experiences. Another strategy involves provision of preservice or inservice education at rural sites, often through distance education technology. Each section includes focal questions for consideration or discussion. Contains 19 references. (SV)

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EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR RURAL TEACHERS AND PROFESSIONALS

Colin Boylan and Helen Bandy - Australia, Canada

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EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR RURAL TEACHERS AND PROFESSIONALS

Colin Boylan and Helen Bandy – Australia, Canada

ABSTRACT

Rural areas have traditionally had problems recruiting suitable professionals who are committed to remaining in the district. Part of this problem stems from the isolation experienced by professionals when they work and live in the bush. In this presentation , we identify seven variables that impinge on the educational needs and training requirements for rural professionals. These are: 1. Selection; 2. Multiculturalism; 3. Community; 4. Paraprofessionals; 5. Government Resources; 6. Induction – Mentorship; and 7. Preservice - Inservice programs. Within each variable we examine specific 'best practice' programs that have been developed to enhance rural professional retention.

INTRODUCTION

In many small rural and isolated communities, professional people like teachers, nurses, doctors, and social workers are often regarded as transients. Most professionals have come to the community from somewhere else. They are typically not 'a local' and tend to stay for only a few years. This perception of rural professionals – however accurate or inaccurate it may be – is cited among the contributory reasons why attracting and retaining rural professionals is a continuing issue for these communities.

The heart of this issue is the focus for this keynote presentation: the education of and training for rural professionals. We will examine the multi-dimensional complexity implicit in addressing the educational and training needs for rural professionals.

Part of the challenge in addressing this focus is the disparate nature of the groups, their training programs, their appointment practices, their certification requirements, their location in rural regions and their degree of unionisation. We believe there is a need for a cross-disciplinary analysis and synthesis of the approaches, strategies and programs used in each of the professional areas that target the selection and recruitment of suitable professionals who are committed to remaining in rural communities for longer than one or two years. This synthesis of 'best practice' has been singularly lacking to this point in time. To provide substance to this point, a few examples are described -

1. Rural Teachers. The Ministry of Education in Western Australia in 1994 commenced an inquiry into rural teacher appointments and retention practices. The Ministry of Education in British Columbia in 1988, provided expansion funds to the three faculties of education to form consortia with Regional Colleges and their neighbouring school districts, to provide local teacher education programs. A further incentive was offered in 1989, a Student Forgivable Loan Program for all new teachers in B.C. School districts that the Ministry identified as rural; and
2. Rural Doctors. The Australian Federal government has initiated through the Family Medicine program, a strategy known as the Rural Training Scheme to train General Practice doctors for rural practices and assist these doctors to become vocationally registered General Practitioners. The Ministry of Health in British Columbia has an alternate fee payment program for rural doctors as well as a northern and isolation travel program for specialists.

Recruiting and retaining professionals in rural areas have been noted as the twin edges of the personnel problem in many countries including Australia and Canada. This problem is one that is influenced significantly by economic conditions. The recent recession in many Western countries and the balance of supply and demand indices for employment positions has led to some interesting situations. For example, at the present time in British Columbia and in most Australian state education systems, teacher turnover rates are lower than they were ten years ago. This tightening of the employment market has led to a more stable teaching population in urban and rural areas. Teachers are also staying, on average, longer in their current positions. In British Columbia, research conducted in the early 1980s by Haughey and Murphy (1985) suggested teachers stayed, on average, for two years in a rural school. Recent data by Storey (1992) and Bandy and Boyer (1994) indicated teachers remained, on average, for five years. Similar patterns are evident in most Australian state education systems. Educational administrators and school systems are more fortunate than some other professional occupations as this stability and a surplus of applicants for the few positions vacant ensures a 'best qualified' applicant is appointed. Unfortunately, where supply and demand are more closely balanced in professions such as doctors and occupational therapists, rural communities still find it difficult to attract and retain these professionals.

The Complexity of Recruitment and Retention

There are many variables that affect the process of who applies for and is appointed to a rural position. Some variables relate to the biography of the applicant, other variables to their pre-employment education and training programs, others relate to the process of adjustment and work satisfaction in the rural setting. One frequently cited concern that rural communities must acknowledge and address in their recruitment and retention practices is isolation. Research conducted on rural professionals who leave their communities after a short time clearly establish isolation as the main reason. A recent survey of physicians in the rural areas of British Columbia showed that doctors felt isolation from other medical colleagues, was more detrimental to their job satisfaction than social isolation.

In this keynote presentation, the main variables that are identified and regarded as central to improving the selection, recruitment, training and retention of professionals for rural areas are outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Variables that effect rural professionals

Each variable will be briefly addressed. Some of the issues, questions and exemplary programs that pertain to that variable will be examined.

1.0 Selection

The selection variable consists of two major and interrelated components:-

i) the RECRUITMENT of professionals for rural locations; and

ii) the RETENTION of professionals in these rural locations.

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1.1 Recruitment Issues and Practices

Within this component, issues that need to be examined can be framed as a series of questions for researchers, administrators and communities to consider.

1) What personal characteristics will predispose professionals to seek out a rural appointment?
2) Can recruitment practices also identify applicants who are likely to stay in the rural community for a extended period of appointment?
3) What aspects of pre-service educational programs offered by particular tertiary institutions increase the likelihood of professionals seeking a rural appointment?

In New South Wales, the Department of School Education initiated the Rural Teacher Education Scholarship program in 1989 to select and appoint beginning teachers to rural and isolated schools. The program has been well received by both pre-service education students and rural community organisations as a means of recruiting teachers who understand and appreciate rural schools and communities. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners through its Directorate of Rural Education and Training actively selects potential General Practitioners for its Rural Training Scheme through a comprehensive screening process conducted before potential participants complete the university based studies.

The decentralisation of education programs in British Columbia to the Regional Colleges has provided access to teaching, social work and other professions for many people living in northern and rural areas. The Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) conducted by James Cook University allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to remain in their isolated communities while completing their pre-service training. These future professionals are often mature people with families who wish to remain in their rural community and are likely to seek employment in their communities upon graduation.

1.2 Retention Issues

To assist in understanding how to retain professionals in their rural locations, the Challenge-Deficit Model of-Ankrah-Dove (1982) provides a useful interpretive framework. In her paper, Ankrah-Dove suggested the sociological orientation held by the individual will influence the manner in which the professional reacts to a rural appointment. She suggested that those individuals who hold a 'challenge' viewpoint focus on the positive, beneficial, personally and professionally satisfying aspects of the rural lifestyle and enjoy their time in the rural community.

The 'deficit' viewpoint focuses on the lack of services and sporting facilities, the isolation from family and friends, the long distances to go anywhere, the need to receive compensatory benefits for the hardships/dislocation from larger centres. People holding a 'deficit' view are often in the rural location because they see it as a fast-track promotional move for their career or they were initially attracted to the idea of a rural appointment because of the 'fringe benefits' such as extra salary.

Research by Boylan (1991) suggested that those teachers who remain in rural location(s) for extended periods of time do hold this 'challenge' viewpoint. A survey in British Columbia supports this view, finding that the teachers who remain in their rural appointments claiming a high level of job satisfaction possessed at least one of two significant attributes:

i) were stable in their family life (often a professional couple where both partners were employed) who were self-contained introspective people; and

ii) were 'joiners' who belonged to clubs and other interest groups and thus became actively involved in the life of the community.

These teachers form the continuity and stability in educational settings valued by their communities.

Questions that arise for retention practices include:-

1) How can 'challenge viewpoint' people be identified? and
2) What are appropriate ways of supporting and nurturing these professionals in the rural communities?

Some of these questions will re-emerge in other components of Figure 1. In particular, the nature of education programs, the location of the educational institutions, the inclusion of courses on rural sociology, and the opportunity to engage in supervised practica in rural locations in the pre-certification programs will be raised. These provide guidance to the selection variable.

2.0 Multiculturalism

Settling into a new community is a personally challenging process. For a teacher or professional appointed or recruited to a rural location, there are many tacit, local mores, traditions and beliefs that will be encountered. The degree to which local cultural values impact upon the professional will affect the ease of 'settling into' the district.

In some rural communities, the professional will encounter other cultures and world views to the one(s) they know. These differences can be both exciting, challenging and inviting to participate in the new rural culture, as well as being sources of anxiety, isolation, and alienation.

For example, in some rural locations, there is a significant proportion of people with English as a second language. In places like Griffith and Mareeba, the Italian culture has a significant and pervasive impact. In other places, like Mt Isa and Lightning Ridge, there are many ethnic groups represented. Teachers and professionals working in these communities usually enjoy the cultural diversity evident in these locations.

In the more isolated and remote rural locations where the rural professional interacts with the dominant aboriginal culture, the process of adjustment and socialisation may be more difficult. Research by Crowther (1988) on teachers in aboriginal communities in rural Queensland and the Northern Territory suggested that the differences in cultural perspectives were one of the main contributory factors in the high turnover rate of these professionals.

The British Columbia scene is not too different from rural Queensland and Northern Territory. Canadians take pride in their individual cultural heritage. Rural communities are unique and foster their uniqueness. For example, each B.C. First Nations community has a different set of mores and customs from each other native community depending upon the Nation. It may be just as difficult for a native person from another tribe to become accepted in a community as for the urban trained Caucasian or Asian professional. In addition, several communities have been founded by particular religious groups. Prespatou, in Northern B.C., is a Mennonite farming community where modern technology is unacceptable. Argenta, in the Kootenays, is a Quaker community where children are Home Schooled through the Provincial Correspondence Branch. It is extremely difficult for an outside professional to be accepted by some of these communities.

So, the challenge in this variable to administrators, trainers and human resource managers can be framed as a series of questions:

1) How can appropriate personnel be selected and appointed to these multi-cultural communities?
2) What preparatory programs and experiences can be developed to sensitise professionals to these cultures?
3) Could the schools in the unique rural communities encourage pupils, at an early age, to becoming professionals in their own community when they are adults?
4) How could professional education programs provide some multicultural experiences to their undergraduate students?

3.0 Community

3.1 *Involvement/Integration*

The degree of integration into the local community in which the rural teacher and professional work is likely to exert an influence - possibly considerable – upon their preparedness to stay. Components of community integration include the degree of

community appreciation of the professionals' work, the degree to which the community values the professional living locally, participating in community activities and programs, as well as perceptions of how the community regards and accepts the professional. No doubt all contribute to the influence a community exercises in the hearts and minds of its teachers and professionals. Boylan (1991) found that long-staying rural teachers believed, on the whole, their work was valued by their communities, their contributions to the community were valued and the community valued having the teacher living locally.

Additionally, the professionals' perceptions of whether they considered themselves to be 'a local', and were regarded as 'a local' by the community can be influential reasons in deciding to remain or leave. Boylan (1991) reported that the majority of long-staying rural teachers believed they were 'locals' and were regarded as locals by their communities. The evidence on this point of being 'a local' however, is not unequivocal. There was a proportion (9.1%) of these long-staying teachers who felt it better not to live within their school community.

Alexander and Bandy (1990) found that a supportive school administration was a significant factor in the successful acclimatisation of first year teachers in B.C. rural schools. Also, they noted:

'Almost twice as many first year teachers, who were raised in a village or rural area, reported a high level of satisfaction with their position than those who were raised in urban settings.' (Alexander and Bandy, 1990)

These factors should be appreciated by rural communities when they wish to integrate beginning professionals into their community.

Questions that arise from this aspect of community involvement/integration include -

1) How can communities help the professional feel welcome?
2) When does welcoming become prying?
3) What strategies can rural communities put in place to help the professional settle into the community?

3.2 *Adult Education*

One factor that is difficult for a professional to comprehend is that not all members of rural communities are literate. Schools often become 'community' schools and provide evening classes for adults. These community schools form the centre of the community life with both educational and cultural programs being offered. Rural professionals are 'roped into' offering sessions because they are usually the only 'experts' available.

Some questions that rural professionals need to consider are:

1) How willing are rural professionals to be involved in community education?
2) Is it fair for a community to expect a professional to play a leadership role in a community school?

4.0 Paraprofessionals

Well trained paraprofessionals in rural communities can do much to relieve the feeling of professional isolation for a newly appointed professional person to a rural position. However, not all paraprofessionals are trained. One teacher in the B.C. predominantly native community of Telegraph Creek stated that:

> 'I am a rural primary teacher with 11 native students and 1 non-native. 6 out of 12 of my students qualify for learning assistance and at least one requires professional counselling. Our school has no L.A. teacher. Our 'teachers' assistants' are unqualified members of the community' (Bandy and Boyer 1994, p26)

This teacher faced the integration of 'special needs' pupils without a trained assistant.

Similarly, in the medical community, nurses aides, home-care workers, paramedics (such as ambulance attendant.) and counsellors play a vital role that often exceeds their level of expertise. For instance in the Cariboo-Chilcotin, the home-school co-ordinators are the only link with some of the parents whose children arrive in school speaking only the Chilcotin language.

In some remote rural Australian communities, where no professional is located eg. a doctor, some nurses are permitted to carry out simple procedural practices and prescribe/administer certain drugs pending the arrival of the Royal Flying Doctor.

On the outback station, the home tutor/governess takes on the 'para-teacher' role when supervising lessons of the children from either print based materials or interactive lessons via School of the Air radio, telematics or satellite delivery modes.

For the rural professional, it is important to work with any paraprofessional that is available. In some instances the professional may be required to train the paraprofessional.

Some questions that arise concerning rural professionals working with paraprofessionals successfully are:

1) How should paraprofessionals be recruited for rural areas?
2) Who should be responsible for ensuring that the paraprofessionals are adequately trained?
3) How could the work of paraprofessionals be monitored to ensure that they are not asked to work beyond their capabilities?

5.0 Government

Commonwealth and State governments have recognised the importance of providing professionals to the rural communities. Both levels of government operate targeted programs that focus on selecting potential professionals for rural appointments, assisting professionals to relocate into rural communities, supporting the work practices of the professionals and assisting with continuing education and training activities for these professional people.

In education, the Commonwealth government has initiated a range of programs that seek to enhance the educational opportunities of students in rural locations through programs such as the National Country Areas Program, the Disadvantaged Schools Project and the Students-at-Risk program. Even though these programs are focussed on students, teachers indirectly receive considerable support through the allocation of resources, improvement in telecommunications technology and the reduction in professional isolation.

At the State level in New South Wales the Rural Schools Plan (Metherell, 1989) has succeeded in identifying and training pre-service teachers for rural locations. These graduates ensure the continuity of schools and their programs in rural areas. In both Queensland and New South Wales the restructuring and decentralisation of distance education provision is another example of how state governments are committed to principles of educational equity and access for all rural people.

In medicine, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners in association with the Commonwealth government operates the rural Vocational Training Program. In this program city trained doctors are offered the opportunity to participate in a rural general practice program that leads ultimately to becoming registered as a vocationally registered G.P. This program was initiated in response to political and social pressure resulting from the rural doctor shortage across Australia.

In Canada, the provision of professionals in rural and northern areas is complicated by jurisdictional issues. Licensing is very often provided by Provincial or Territorial governments and under the constitution the Federal government only can influence employment patterns by offering financial incentives. These take the form of special income tax deductions for service in northern latitudes and special northern living allowances to federal public servants. Under the Department of Northern Affairs, the federal government has an obligation to provide medical and educational services in the Territories. Higher salaries for professionals and paraprofessionals are used to recruit people to serve in these areas.

Key questions that Federal and State governments need to address include: -

1 How effective is the articulation between Federal and State funded programs?

2 What forms of support are appropriate to a) recruit and b) retain professionals in these rural areas?

3 How can rural professionals provide advice, comment or feedback to State or Federal departments that are often thousands of kilometres away?.

6.0 Induction and Mentorship

The importance of induction and mentorship programs for beginning professionals has received attention in both urban and rural areas. Mentorship has long been recognised as even more vital to beginning rural practitioners to overcome the tremendous feeling of professional isolation that they experience in their first year. The literature lends overwhelming support for induction and mentorship programs for beginning teacher (Hirsh, 1990). Not only does the induction program benefit the beginning teacher but it also contributes to the professional development of the more experienced teacher who acts as a mentor (Killion, 1990). The British Columbia Government supplies some funding for districts that submit proposals for induction and mentorship programs.

Originally, many programs, such as the Induction Program developed by the rural school district of Sunshine Coast, were programs developed and implemented by school districts. The Sunshine Coast Induction Program, planned in conjunction with Malaspina College, was implemented in 1991 to meet the needs of new teachers in the district (Gleadow, 1992). The program included a district orientation day, three extra full inservice days, time to network with other teachers and an introduction to a wide variety of activities. The newer Mentorship programs are a result of the need for school-based programs rather than district-based. In the 1994 Nechako Mentorship program not only will new teachers be teamed with a compatible experienced teacher mentor but also mentorship is available to anyone who would like help due to:

i) a new position or assignment;

ii) new to the teaching profession (1 – 3 years); and

iii) a specific area of difficulty. (Nechako Mentorship Committee, 1994)

The Northern Territory education department conducts an induction program for newly appointed teachers that consists of a one week program conducted immediately before the school term starts. Additionally for teachers appointed to remote Aboriginals schools, there is a follow up program at the end of Term 1. In other state departments of education, beginning teacher induction programs, induction programs for teachers new to the region and programs for newly appointed executive teachers are regular features of the human resource management programs.

As Hirsh (1990) stated 'Beginning teachers want to derive personal satisfaction from teaching to develop professional competence, and to acquire a sense of community security'. Mentorship programs in rural areas will begin to provide this 'sense of community security'.

Questions that rural administrators in all professions need to ask are:

1) How can mentors be provided for new rural professionals?

2) Who should be recruited as a mentor for a rural professional?

3) What agency should provide the funding for a Mentorship program?

4) Should rural districts provide induction programs as well as mentorship for newly appointed professionals?

7.0 Preservice and Inservice

7.1 Preservice

With the decentralisation of Teacher Education Programs in British Columbia there are several exemplary programs for rural teachers. For example, the East Kootenay Teacher Education Program is a consortium program involving six rural school districts, East Kootenay Community College and the University of Victoria. Students are recruited from the local districts and receive all their training locally while completing a Bachelor of Education from the University of Victoria. Local instructors are teamed with UVic faculty members to deliver courses. In the 1994/95 academic year some of the courses will be delivered from campus through interactive television. All practica are completed in the local area; courses in Sociology include a rural component; methodology courses refer to locally developed curricular; and every effort is made by local districts to hire the graduates from the program.

In order for education students on-campus to learn about rural communities the B.C. Ministry of Education has provided funding each year since 1990, for the publication of a booklet entitled *Unique Opportunities: Teaching in Rural British Columbia*. Copies of the booklet are distributed to all education graduates from the three British Columbia universities. Also, Rural On-Campus Days occur at the University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria when rural school district personnel come to campus to speak to students and recruit them to complete their practica in rural areas.

Various rural Australian universities, such as Charles Sturt University, University of Southern Queensland, Edith Cowan University and James Cook University, have developed preservice education programs that have a specific focus on preparing rural teachers. These programs include typically on-campus courses that examine issues in rural sociology, teaching in rural and isolated schools, and using telecommunications technology in the design and delivery of lessons to remote sites (Boylan, 1994). Practical opportunities to engage in teaching rounds over a range of settings including small schools, isolated schools, aboriginal schools and distance education centres compliment the on-campus components of these programs.

More recently, the University of Queensland, Monash University and the University of New South Wales Medicine Faculties have instituted similar programs. Final year medicine students can select to undertake their resident's year in a rural base hospital within their respective state.

7.2 Inservice

Many British Columbia inservice programs for rural professionals are supplied through the Knowledge Network, a provincially funded television network. Programs are designed by government agencies, universities and colleges and are able to be received throughout B.C. via satellite or on a cablevision channel. Programs are both for credit towards degrees and for non-credit Professional Development or diploma programs. Interactive television is also available in many northern communities through the regional colleges. A similar program for health providers has been established recently in Australia using Commonwealth funding. Satellite technology is used to deliver continuing education programs to rural health practitioners.

Several issues are entwined in the inservice and continuing education variable for rural professionals. One central issue is whether it should be mandatory or voluntary. In education, social work, medicine and nursing in Australia continuing education is voluntary. In the legal profesion it is mandatory. This can create many anomalies. For example, Boylan (1991) found in his study of long-staying rural teachers 40.2% had completed a 2 year Teachers Certificate, 27.6% had completed a 3 year Diploma of Teaching and the balance (32.4%) completed a 4 year qualifications as their initial teacher preparation. Yet 72.9% reported that they had undertaken no further tertiary studies. Many had participated in short 1 – 3 day inservice courses but many had not. This finding raises the question of the professionalism of the practitioner.

In Australia continuing education of nurses is voluntary. The responsibility to maintain up to date knowledge, competencies and skills resides with the individual. This issue has received a significant amount of interest over the past 5 years. Rather than introduce mandatory inservice programs for nurses strategies that have been developed include:

i) establishing Centres for Professional Development in Health Sciences (Hase, 1990);

ii) creating a model for Nursing Practice Career developed by the South Australian Health Commission (Gaston, 1989);

iii) legislating through the Training Guarantee Act (1990) that employers must spend 1.25% of their budget on staff professional development;

iv) using award restructuring and multiskilling as means of promoting continuing education of nurses (Lok, 1992); and

v) establishing Rural health Training units to provide continuing education programs to rural health professionals, including nurses, in rural and isolated locations.

It should be noted that in the USA, nineteen states require mandatory participation in nurse continuing education programs for licence renewal and continuing to be able to practise (Schlosser, Jones and Whatley, 1993).

Currently, the legal profession in New South Wales requires every solicitor to undertake 30 hours of continuing education each year to maintain the right to practise. Developments are occurring in the medicine area whereby those general practitioners who wish to maintain their vocationally registered G.P. status will be required to gain 170 points of accreditation based on continuing education points (150) and practice assessment points (20) over each three year period.

Many questions arise concerning the issue of preservice and inservice programs:

1) How can programs delivered at an urban university be adapted to the needs of rural practitioners?

2) Who should be selected to teach in programs for rural practitioners?

3) What aspects of rural sociology could be included in professional programs?

4) How could preservice and inservice programs be linked with mentorship?

5) Should participation in inservice education be a mandatory or voluntary component of continuing registration for the professional?

6) What are appropriate ways of providing access to continuing education for rural professionals?

Introduction to discussion groups

Every jurisdiction has to work within their own frames of reference, whether they be constitutional or financial. One of the objectives for the discussion groups that follows this keynote presentation will be to canvass local, regional and international opinions related to the problems of the *Education and Training for Rural Teachers and Professionals*. It is only through opportunities such as this conference that we can share strategies to address the issues that have been identified. We can take advantage of our shared knowledge of common problems and thus plan future directions on a more far reaching global scale.

In the remaining one and a half hours of our discussion session, we have provided some questions for each sub-group to consider. We suggest that each sub-group starts with these questions and then adds other questions that relate to the particular variable from Figure 1. We look forward to hearing how your sub-group has addressed these and other questions.

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